

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 435

By Hazlewood

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Charles Henry Coolidge, Sr., of Signal Mountain, the nation's oldest Medal of Honor recipient.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Charles Henry Coolidge, Sr., the nation's oldest Medal of Honor recipient, who had proudly served his country far beyond the call of duty in the U.S. Army infantry during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coolidge was born on August 4, 1921, to Walter Parlin Coolidge and Grace Irene McCracken Coolidge of Chattanooga and graduated from Chattanooga High School in 1939; he passed away a mere four months shy of his 100th birthday; and

WHEREAS, he was drafted into the military in 1942 and assigned to Company M of the 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division; formed in 1917 during World War I and composed largely of Texas National Guard troops, the outfit was dubbed the "Texas" division; and

WHEREAS, Technical Sergeant Coolidge saw action in North Africa, Italy (including the infamous crossing of the Rapido River and the Battle for Monte Cassino in early 1944), France, and Germany and was part of the first American division to invade Europe during the war; and

WHEREAS, on May 25, 1944, he landed at Anzio with the 36th Infantry Division and helped open the gates of Rome for the 5th Army, for which gallant service he was awarded the Silver Star; and

WHEREAS, after being transferred out of Italy, Technical Sergeant Coolidge and his fellow infantrymen landed on the beaches of southern France in August 1944 to begin their march toward the Siegfried Line; and

WHEREAS, near Belmont-sur-Buttant, France in October of that year, "his unit was ordered to hold off the German forces threatening to attack the right flank of the division's Third Battalion, 141st Infantry"; and

WHEREAS, with no superior officer present, Charles Coolidge found himself in charge of inexperienced replacement troops, almost none of whom had seen combat, when they encountered an enemy force on October 24, 1944; and

WHEREAS, the twenty-three-year-old Technical Sergeant Coolidge and approximately thirty soldiers were desperately outnumbered, facing down German troops that were supported by tanks; he attempted "to bluff the Germans by a show of assurance and boldness called upon them to surrender, whereupon the enemy opened fire" according to his Medal of Honor citation; and

WHEREAS, during the course of four days of continuous fighting, the American soldiers repeatedly repelled the numerically superior enemy, while Technical Sergeant Coolidge walked up and down the front line in the direct line of fire, leading, calming, and reassuring his raw troops; and

WHEREAS, at one point, Sergeant Coolidge dodged behind some trees to avoid enemy fire and "Secure[ing] all the hand grenades he could carry, [then] he crawled forward and inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing enemy"; and

WHEREAS, "displaying great coolness and courage, Sergeant Coolidge then directed and conducted an orderly withdrawal, being himself the last to leave the position" after enemy reinforcements arrived; and

WHEREAS, miraculously, not a single American life was lost in the four-day firefight, and Charles Coolidge emerged unhurt, receiving only a small scratch on the toe of his boot from the battle; and

WHEREAS, on June 18, 1945, in a rare battlefield ceremony at a bombed-out airfield near Dornstadt, Germany, Charles Coolidge was awarded the Medal of Honor by Lt. Gen. Wade H. Haislip; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the Medal of Honor and the Silver Star, he had received the Bronze Star in 1944, and he was belatedly awarded France's highest military decoration, the Légion d'honneur (Legion of Honor), by officials of the French consulate in 2006; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coolidge lived a long and bountiful life after leaving the military in 1945, working at the business his father had founded in 1910, Chattanooga Printing & Engraving, until his official retirement in 2017 at the age of ninety-five; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coolidge was a quiet and unassuming gentleman, but his legacy lives on through Chattanooga's largest public space, Coolidge Park, and the new Charles H. Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center, which honors the heritage of the Medal of Honor and serves to educate the next generation about the six character traits that embody the heroic recipients of the nation's highest medal; and

WHEREAS, in addition to these memorials, Chattanooga and the nation have honored Mr. Coolidge in many other ways; a segment of U.S. Highway 27 in Hamilton County has been named in his honor, and a permanent roadside marker on Signal Mountain has been erected to recognize his heroic actions in World War II combat; and

WHEREAS, he was also honored in 2013 as the first of only twelve Medal of Honor recipients to be featured on the cover of the Medal of Honor forever stamp sheet issued by the U.S. Postal Service; and

WHEREAS, he was given the 2021 George Marshall Award by the State Funeral for World War II Veterans organization in honor of his significant service; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coolidge is interred at the Chattanooga National Military Cemetery with full military honors reserved specifically for Medal of Honor recipients; his funeral service was held at First Presbyterian Church, where he was a member; and

WHEREAS, this true patriot and hometown hero is survived by his son, Lt. General (Retired) Charles H. Coolidge, Jr., his wife, Bonnie, and their three children, Charlie Coolidge, Bradford Coolidge, and his wife, Amy, and their children, Bradford "Buddy" and Jack, and Colleen Lindner, her husband, Kent, and their daughter, Laurel; his son William P. Coolidge, his wife, Christie, and their children, Catherine Hagaman and her husband, Lance, and their children, Connelly, Brighton, and Leland, Brandon Coolidge, and Kimberly Everett and her husband, Cody, and her children, Jaimie and Skyler; and his son John Coolidge, his wife, Marie, and their two children, John and Sara; and

WHEREAS, he was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Frances Seepe Coolidge; his brother, Walter P. Coolidge, Jr.; and his sister, Mary M. Cissna; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Coolidge was a devoted family man, and his family hopes that he will be remembered more for his long and bountiful post-war life, especially his positive impact on the lives of others, than for the military service for which he received the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, at ninety-nine years of age, Charles Henry Coolidge, Sr., still stood tall among his fellow Tennesseans as a man of honesty, humility, and integrity in a modern world in which those qualities are all too rare, and we should pause to remember his selfless and courageous service in war and his life of purpose and commitment during peacetime; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Charles Henry Coolidge, Sr., of Signal Mountain, the nation's oldest Medal of Honor recipient, reflecting fondly upon his bravery as a soldier and

his excellence as a human being, and extend to his family and many friends our sympathy and condolences.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.